



Los Angeles County  
Department of Regional Planning

*Planning for the Challenges Ahead*



May 15, 2007

Bruce W. McClendon FAICP  
Director of Planning

The Honorable Board of Supervisors  
383 Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration  
500 West Temple Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dear Supervisors:

**PRIORITY NEEDS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2007-08**

The Department of Regional Planning is submitting its priority needs and funding requirements for Fiscal Year 2007-08. These priority needs will, if funded, enable the department to provide enhanced levels of service for the Board of Supervisors, Regional Planning Commission, unincorporated communities, landowners, and the general public. The programs will affect every supervisorial district and effectuate strategic plan strategies and objectives of the County through service and workforce excellence, and organizational effectiveness. A more detailed list of our priorities can be found in the enclosed attachment.

Our first priority need for Fiscal Year 2007-2008 is the **Salary Equity Proposal (\$1,554,000)**. The Department of Regional Planning lags behind other area agencies in planning salary. Higher salaries are paid in Pasadena (23% higher), Santa Monica (23%), West Hollywood (21%) and the City of Los Angeles (15%). This salary disparity contributes to our vacancy problem by making the recruitment, hiring and retention of qualified competent staff an ongoing competition against other much higher paying agencies. This issue is further brought to light when comparing planner salaries to engineering salaries at the Department of Public Works; both sets of professionals work on extremely complex development proposals, yet engineering salaries are an average of 31% higher.

Approval of this proposal will support a better pool of candidates to select from, better retention of employees and a lower turnover rate. It would also support the County's Strategic Plan goals relating to Service Excellence and Workforce Excellence. This would bring the Department into salary parity with the City of Los Angeles and close the gap with the even higher paying agencies.

Our second priority is, **Special Area Planning and Community Standards (\$353,000)**. This priority would address updating community and area plans throughout each of the five Supervisorial Districts. In essence, planners would work with community groups to foster active participation and involvement by residents and local businesses. Additionally, a consultant will be hired to suggest a prototype plan document that would be followed to update existing plans or in preparation of new plans.

Our third priority is **Expanded Field Office Counseling and Processing (\$556,000)**. Funding will help finance staffing needs to provide adequate personnel and community based planning service in nine field offices throughout the County. Unfortunately, there is currently not enough staff to provide sufficient coverage in all field offices. The additional positions requested will mitigate the long wait times, reduce the number of complaints, and provide better customer service.

Our fourth priority, **Hearing Examiner (\$300,000)**, will provide for a contract Hearing Examiner and three salary Hearing Examiners to conduct community-based public hearings on pending cases. The Hearing Examiner will be hired to conduct local public hearings on high profile, targeted cases throughout the unincorporated area on a test basis. This will aid in reducing and/or eliminating the public having to come down to downtown Los Angeles as well as increase the streamlining of the public hearing process. On May 3 the Department was ordered by the Board of Supervisors to conduct a 120-day study and prepare a report regarding this priority need. The costs will be finalized with the completion of the report.

Our fifth priority is **Updated Environmental Process and Procedure System (\$200,000)**. This effort will provide funding to update the Environmental Processing Manual for all environmental assessments and revise the County Environmental Document Reporting Procedures and Guidelines to be consistent with current Department procedures. A consultant will be hired to complete the EIR and Initial Study Preparation Manual, formulate and implement a Mitigation Monitoring Program to streamline the Department's current ad hoc process, and computerize the Initial Study information database.

Our sixth priority is **Public Hearing Room Technology Upgrade (\$220,000)**. Funding will provide the staffing needs for the modernization of technology as well as a more user friendly information system that will enable the use of monitors for the Commission and public to view staff exhibits, staff reports, and other viable documents. Extensive staff training will be provided to show planners a more efficient way to properly present materials.


Our last priority need is **Resource Management, Training and Development (\$92,000)**. Funding for this priority will cover additional staffing needs to build knowledge and skills among less experienced staff, monitor and address turn over, roll out new training, develop mentorship and oversee employee evaluations and assist in examinations due to the Department's hiring difficulties.

As we have stated in the past, it is our strong belief that thoughtful and planned program expenditures, as outlined herein and reiterated in portions of the County and department Strategic Plans, will accomplish their purpose. We believe that planning programs and information technology will be increasingly vital in the new millennium. These programs, such as the Countywide LAR-IAC Project utilizing information technology and geographic databases, will improve customer service, streamline development permit processes, and enhance decision making throughout the County.

Considering the positive contributions that these funding requests will make to the strategic initiatives of the County and the total effectiveness of the County, we strongly recommend your consideration and funding of the priority needs listed herein for next year. The **Salary Equity Proposal** would be an important first step in helping the Department of Regional Planning better serve the County of Los Angeles.

Sincerely,

DEPARTMENT OF REGIONAL PLANNING

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. McClendon', written over a horizontal line.

Bruce W. McClendon, FAICP  
Director of Planning

BWM:TNE:KC:mo

Attachment

c: Hamai, BOS  
Janssen, CAO  
Englund  
Gutierrez  
Bolke  
Saltsman  
Pederson  
Novak  
Hammond  
Guzman

## DEPARTMENT OF REGIONAL PLANNING FISCAL YEAR 2007-2008 ISSUES/PRIORITIES

<i>Program</i>	<i>Gross Appropriation</i>	<i>Revenue/IFT</i>	<i>Net County Cost</i>	<i>Budgeted Positions</i>
<b>Salary Equity Proposal</b>	<b>\$1,554,000</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>\$1,554,000</b>	

The Department experiences a significant wage difference of at least 26.7% as compared to other County departments that also undertake complex caseloads similar to the planners. An increase in wages would allow DRP a greater selection of qualifying applicants in which planning expertise and knowledge is essential to the assigned work. Additionally, the Department would be able to lower the high turnover rate experienced every year. Planners often leave the Department in favor of pursuing work at other public agencies, such as the City of Los Angeles, that offer higher wages. Furthermore, the assignments conducted by the planners can be very stressful with some being highly controversial in nature and scope. These factors alone necessitate a need to establish a more equitable salary structure for the Department. Please see the attached memo to the Chief Administrative Office for additional information.

<b>Special Area Planning and Community Standards</b>	<b>\$353,000</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>\$353,000</b>	<b>3.0</b>
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This reflects funding for three planning staff members to update community and area plans throughout each of the five Supervisorial Districts. Eight plans are between 17 and 28 years old (Altadena, Antelope Valley, East Los Angeles, Hacienda Heights, Rowland Heights, Santa Catalina Island, Walnut Park and West Athens/Westmont) and need to be updated to address relevant planning issues. The planners would work with community groups to foster active participation and involvement by residents and local businesses. A consultant would be hired to review the 13 adopted area, community and neighborhood plans and to suggest a prototype plan document (i.e. format, content, land use map legend, etc.) that would be followed as existing plans are updated or new plans prepared.

<b>Expanded Field Office Counseling and Processing</b>	<b>\$556,000</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>\$556,000</b>	<b>7.0</b>
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This impacts the Land Use Regulation Program and reflects funding for enhanced customer service and support staff in our nine field offices. This request addresses the problem of inadequate staffing in our nine field offices. Presently, six planners are assigned to cover nine field offices without backup support. The need to provide enhanced customer service and adequate personnel in the nine field offices is a vital part to implementing customer service improvements. The nine field offices are distributed throughout each of the five Supervisorial Districts. Presently, five of the field offices experience heavy customer traffic and lengthy wait times (Antelope Valley, Arcadia, La Puente, East Los Angeles and Firestone). Some of our other field offices such as Calabasas require fulltime staff. "Circuit rider" positions, utilizing more experienced principal regional planners will be deployed to turn-around permits more quickly and back-up planners when absent. The "circuit rider" will improve customer service by ensuring more experienced planners are available in our field offices and serve as backup during vacations, sickness, training and vacancies. Funding this program will support the County Strategic Plan (**service and workforce excellence**) by reducing customer counter and phone wait times, shortening permit review period, decreasing the number of complaints, and improve the overall level of customer service in our field offices. (Impacts: All Supervisorial Districts)

<i>Program</i>	<i>Gross Appropriation</i>	<i>Revenue/IFT</i>	<i>Net County Cost</i>	<i>Budgeted Positions</i>
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<b>Hearing Examiner</b>	<b>\$300,000</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>\$300,000</b>	<b>1.0</b>
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Provides for a contract Hearing Examiner and a salaried staff Hearing Officer to conduct community-based public hearings on pending cases. The Regional Planning Commission and staff hearing officers currently conduct public hearings at the Department headquarters in Los Angeles. On occasion, hearings are also conducted in communities affected by the subject case. A consultant Hearing Examiner will be hired to conduct local public hearings on high profile, targeted cases throughout the unincorporated area on a test basis. This initiative will provide each community with the opportunity to be more directly involved in the public hearing process and will make it easier for citizens to provide testimony by reducing or eliminating trips to downtown Los Angeles. This effort will streamline the public hearing process and will enhance the Planning Commission's ability to review, evaluate and take action on cases before them in an expeditious manner. If fulfilled, this Unmet Need will support County and Departmental Strategic Plan goals relating to Service Excellence (local public hearings are improved customer service to the public) and Organizational Effectiveness (streamlined hearing process and Regional Planning Commission Meetings. (Impacts: All Supervisorial Districts)

<b>Updated Environmental Process and Procedure System</b>	<b>\$200,000</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>\$200,000</b>	<b>0.0</b>
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This program would enable the updating of environmental processing manual for Impact Analysis and revise the county Environmental Document Reporting procedures and guidelines to be consistent with current Department procedures. The program will generate a manual as a guide to consultants writing environmental impact reports. This effort would also produce a mitigation monitoring program to streamline the department's ad hoc process using information technology and database management. This program will reduce staff time necessary to review EIR and therefore fulfill county goals of service and workforce excellence.

<b>Public Hearing Room Technology Upgrade</b>	<b>\$220,000</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>\$220,000</b>	<b>2.0</b>
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The Regional Planning Commission hearing room is in dire need of renovation and modernization. The proposed room renovation will enable the utilization of technology to make the public forum much more user friendly. This would include the use of monitors for the commission and the public to view staff exhibits. Electronic versions of staff reports will be available to the commission on monitors. Staff reports and graphics will be projected on a screen and monitors using presentation software, digital photos and maps will be utilized. In addition, extensive staff training will be required for planners to properly present materials in this more efficient way. Recommendation: See C-1 of Audit.

<i>Program</i>	<i>Gross Appropriation</i>	<i>Revenue/IFT</i>	<i>Net County Cost</i>	<i>Budgeted Positions</i>
<b>Resource Management, Training and Development</b>	<b>\$92,000</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>\$92,000</b>	<b>1.0</b>

An Employee Development Specialist and supporting staff are needed to research and design programs to enhance training, increase competency, ensure all mandatory training is attended and prepare work force for career paths. Staff is needed to develop and implement the system to manage and monitor training for all employees. The addition of two Employee Development Specialists and consultant/trainers is required to implement this program.

<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$3,275,000</b>	<b>\$</b>	<b>\$3,275,000</b>	<b>14.0</b>
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